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Windows XP Arrives

Unless another round of legal wrangling delays it, Windows XP should be available for human consumption on October 25. On that day, the first two members of the Windows XP family will be released: Windows XP Professional for business use and Windows XP Home for the home computer market.

Similar to Windows 2000, Windows XP is a family of operating systems that share a common software architecture. Effectively, the only difference between XP Home and XP Professional are the features that are packaged with them.

The good news... Microsoft has brought an operating system to market that (they claim) is the most powerful, full-featured, fast and stable operating system that the world has ever known. Except for the marketing hype, most of the gurus of the computer community agree that Windows XP is a significant improvement over Windows 95/98/Me.

The bad news... If you are planning on upgrading your computers to XP, it's not cheap and it may not be simple. There is a price to be paid for stability. In the process of upgrading from the old, unstable operating system to the new, stable XP operating system, all of the old, badly-behaved device drivers, etc. must be replaced with well-behaved versions. Identifying part numbers for video cards, network cards, etc., then locating the manufacturer's web site & downloading the latest versions of software

could be very time-consuming.

The ugly news... Some older applications, such as anti-virus & partitioning software, won't work with XP.

If the computer that you wish to upgrade is running Windows 3.xx, Windows 95 or Windows NT version 3.51: You cannot "upgrade" to XP. You must purchase the full version of XP.

Lastly, there are a large number of older computers that are not physically capable of running XP. According to Microsoft, Minimum hardware requirements are:

- PC with 300 megahertz or higher processor clock speed recommended; 233 MHz minimum required (single or dual processor system); Intel Pentium/Celeron family, or AMD K6/Athlon/Duron family, or compatible processor
- 128 megabytes (MB) of RAM or higher recommended (64 MB minimum supported and may limit performance and some features)
- 1.5 gigabytes (GB) of available hard disk space
- Super VGA (800 × 600) or higher-resolution video adapter and monitor, CD-ROM or DVD drive

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Windows XP Common Features...

As we stated earlier, there are currently two versions of XP, Home and Professional. Most of features are common to both versions. Here is an overview of those features:

Speed

Windows XP boots up, loads applications and resumes processing from hibernation faster than all other Windows operating systems. According to Microsoft, the bootup time is 27-34% faster, resuming from standby is 19-21% faster, resuming from hibernation is 9-13% faster and application load time is 0-25% faster.

User Interface

Windows XP has a new look. According to Microsoft, Windows XP makes it easier to find the information you need and perform the tasks you need to get done. The following items were modified:

- **Control Panel:** The Control Panel has a new design and organization, the Category View. This supposedly makes it easier to find common settings and tasks, and it combines the Help and Support Center with the Control Panel. If you prefer the classic Control Panel, it is always just a click away. The new Category View highlights common tasks, and it displays 10 top-level categories, along with a navigation path to the settings you might want to change.
- **My Documents:** When you open a folder and select a file in Windows XP, the operating system presents a list of likely tasks that you may want to perform with that file. You can click on the task you want. You no longer have to remember which menu, or which keyboard commands, are required to perform that task
- **File and Folder Management:** Windows XP provides several ways to arrange and identify files when viewing them in folders such as My Documents. When a folder is open, you can change views in context, without closing the folder and re-opening it to see the changed view. Files can be organized and displayed

in several ways:

- o **Thumbnails** view displays the images of folder contents on the folder icon so you can quickly identify the contents of the folder.
- o **Filmstrip** view is available for picture folders. Pictures appear in a single row of thumbnail images.
- o **Icons** view displays your files and folders as icons. The file name is displayed under the icon.
- o **List** view displays the contents of a folder as a list of file or folder names preceded by small icons.
- o In **Details** view, Windows lists the contents of the open folder and provides detailed information about your files, including name, type, size, and date modified.

If users don't like the new Windows XP look, they can switch back to a more classic Windows presentation, with all new XP features included.

Remote Assistance

With Remote Assistance, once you give your designated person permission to access your computer, they can use the Internet to view your computer screen and even share control of your computer to help you fix a problem. This feature is not limited to use by technical support groups. Through Remote Assistance, you could also allow a friend or family member (who is also running Windows XP) to give you a hand using System Restore.

System Restore/Recovery

Sometimes, things don't go as planned. If you encounter a problem after installing new hardware or software, the System Restore function has 3 different options to return the computer to stable operation:

- **Device Driver Rollback:** Drivers are the bits of software that come with your digital camera, keyboard, or other device to communicate with your system. If you upgrade a driver and it disrupts your system, in most cases Windows XP can re-



install your previous version of the driver.

- **Last Known Good Configuration:** If you change your hardware or software, then have trouble starting your computer, this feature can help. Windows XP saves your configuration settings after each successful startup. Then, if your system won't start, it uses these "last known good" settings to start your computer and lets you troubleshoot the new hardware or software.
- **System Restore:** This feature works like the Undo command in a word processing program. System Restore automatically monitors and records key system changes. If you change a system setting and then discover a problem, you can easily reverse the change.

Windows Messenger

Windows Messenger allows real-time, voice and video conferencing, instant messaging, and online collaboration.

You can tell when people are away from their computer, if they are busy, or on the phone. Windows Messenger constantly updates a list of other specified users of computers with XP. This makes real-time communication and collaboration with them easy.

Windows Messenger allows users to control their online status. With a single mouse click, users can change their online status to **Busy** or **Away**. They can set Windows Messenger to automatically change their status as **Away** if they have not used their computer for a period of time.

Users can use the Internet and save money on communications by using their PC for free voice and video calls to another PC on the Internet. Windows Messenger allows users to call from their PC to a telephone, using a PC-to-phone service provider that they selected.

XP Architecture

Okay, it's time to get technical. For those of you who care, here is the list of internal features that

make XP better. Some of these features first appeared in other operating systems, but they have supposedly been further improved:

- Protected-mode kernel (like Win2000). Poorly written applications cannot crash the operating system
- Improved handling of DLLs. XP will allow the use of more than 1 version of the same DLL to be in use. Some applications are unable to use the most recent version of a DLL. XP allows those applications to access a "private" copy of the DLL for their use, while allowing the other applications to use the "public" copy of the DLL. No more DLL Hell.
- Critical operating system files are protected from being overwritten when new programs are installed. If one of these files is overwritten, Windows File Protection will restore the correct version.
- If a user attempts to load a device driver that is known to cause problems, the Defective Driver Blocking feature in Windows XP will prevent installation of it.
- Reduced registry fragmentation
- Memory manager does more checking before allocating memory
- Memory manager does a better job of allocating physical memory, reducing the need for disk-based virtual memory.
- When available memory is low, XP throttles down I/O requests & paging. It gets very slow, but it doesn't crash
- Most hardware/software installations or updates will not require XP to reboot as part of the install procedure

Multiple Users on One Computer

Multiple users can be logged onto a single computer & switch between applications that are running for each of those users without logging anyone off or restarting the computer.

Windows XP Home Features...

The features of XP Home version can be summed



up in one word: Multimedia. XP Home includes the following features:

- Windows Media Player provides a single place to play DVDs, organize music, burn CDs, etc.
- Movie Maker allows you capture, edit, organize & share home movies on your computer
- My Pictures allows you to organize, preview and order prints of pictures via a Web service

All of these features have great promise, but don't expect high-end, full-featured performance. A common complaint among reviewers was the conspicuous lack of features considered to be standard in any competitive products.

Windows XP Professional Features...

XP Professional includes includes the following features:

- Remote Desktop technology in Windows XP Professional gives you full access to your office computer and all your data and programs via the Internet or a corporate network. Any computer running Windows 98/Me/NT/2000/XP can use the client software and Internet access to remotely control a computer that runs Windows XP Professional with Remote Desktop enabled. The client software is available on the installation CD for Windows XP Professional and Windows XP Home Edition.

It works well even over slow Internet connections, because only the keyboard input, mouse input, and display output data are transmitted over the network to your remote location

Windows XP Professional includes the following capabilities to make Remote Desktop even more usable:

- **System redirection.** Files on the remote computer are accessible through

Remote Desktop as if they were on a network–shared drive. You can save a document on your home computer, and then start Remote Desktop and use programs on your office computer to edit that document.

- **Printer redirection.** You can work remotely with documents on your office computer, and then print the documents on your printer at home.
- **Port redirection.** You can use the devices on your home computer and the applications on your office computer together via Remote Desktop.
- **Audio.** You can run audio–enabled programs on your office computer and hear the sound from speakers on your home computer.
- **Clipboard.** The Remote Desktop and the client computer share a clipboard that allows data to be interchanged.
- **More.** Remote Desktop also provides the capability to remotely use power management, offline files and folders and ActiveSync® technology.
- Windows XP Professional provides enhancements for wireless networking, such as those based on Wi-Fi 802.11b standard. Windows XP provides Zero Configuration support, allowing a laptop with a wireless adapter card to automatically detect and connect to wireless access points within range.

Windows XP detects signals from wireless devices within range, and notifies the laptop user that he/she is near a network access point, or another Windows XP–based computer with which files and other resources can be shared using wireless transmission.

Windows XP Professional includes Network Location Awareness that allows a



wireless connection to move between different wired networks, such as office network and home network, without reconfiguring the laptop.

- Windows XP supports all three Windows files systems: NTFS, FAT16 & FAT32.
- If you choose to use the NTFS file system for Windows XP, you can encrypt files and folders, and/or restrict access to files. It is a more secure, more reliable and better performing file system than the FAT16 and FAT32 file systems used by Windows 95/98/Me. However, if the files must be available to other computers running Windows 95/98/Me, NTFS cannot be used since those operating systems can't read it.

Cost of Windows XP

Windows XP Home upgrade retails for \$99 and the full version for \$199. XP Professional upgrade retails for \$199 and the full version for \$299. A quick check of the Internet found that no one is offering any deals on the XP upgrades, but full versions of XP can be purchased for \$40-60 less than retail.

Which one: XP Home or XP Professional?

Both versions of XP provide the most important feature that computer users want: Stability. But which one should you choose for home or office?

XP Home would appear to be the obvious choice for home use—or would it? Microsoft has included a suite of multimedia tools that have only basic functionality. Anyone who intends to do any serious work using them will be severely disappointed by the limitations of those tools. So what if you purchase a digital still camera, digital camcorder or CD burner—What will you do? Most vendors provide software with their product. It probably has more features than the XP Home software (It's al-

most impossible to have less).

But if the sum total of your computer usage is word processing and/or surfing the Internet, XP Home would suffice for home use. For the majority of computer users, it has little to offer. The best compliment that we can give this version of XP is that it's \$100 cheaper than XP Professional.

Anyone who has any serious work to do on a computer should spend the extra \$100 for XP Professional. The number of wired & wireless computer networks at home is on the rise as is the number of home DSL connections to the Internet. Home computer users aren't the unsophisticated bunch that they used to be.

The Remote Desktop feature of XP Professional gives users the ability to connect to the desired computer from anywhere they might be, whether it's connecting to the office computer from home or checking e-mail on the home computer while on vacation.

With the advent of wireless networks in both home and office, XP Pro provides the tools that simplify implementation, maintenance and control of wireless networks, XP Home doesn't.

In Conclusion...

For some computer users, upgrading to XP will be worth all of the potential time and trouble. Some will actually have a trouble-free upgrade experience. Others will not. If you are a person who enjoys tinkering with computers and you aren't totally freaked out if it doesn't work the first time, go ahead and upgrade. On the other hand, if playing with computer software makes you uneasy, the upgrade "experience" is definitely not for you.

But what about buying a computer with Windows XP already installed on it? Go ahead. But get XP Professional, not XP Home. Compared to Windows 95/98/Me, Windows XP is rock-solid stable. Spend the additional \$100 to get some useful features instead of an anemic set of barely-usable multi-media functions. In the words of the poet, "If you wanna play, you gotta pay".



For September 2001

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------------|-----------|
| Total Hits | 422,257 | Most Active Hour. | 9-10 a.m. |
| Total User Sessions | 18,250 | Accessed Using Netscape | 19% |
| Average Hits/Day | | Accessed Using Internet | |
| (Monday thru Friday) | 18,132 | Explorer | 77% |
| Average User Sessions/ | | From Windows 95, 98 or | |
| Weekday | 707 | NT | 91% |
| | | Most Active Day of Week. | Monday |



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